

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 20, 2012

Agenda Item: 2012-13 Helena Urban Deer Take

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

In 2003, the Montana Legislature authorized cities to create plans to control wildlife to address public health and safety within city limits. Such plans must be approved by the FWP Commission. The City of Helena subsequently developed an Urban Deer Management Plan seeking to initially remove 350 deer to achieve an objective of 25 deer per square mile. FWP completed a third, programmatic EA in 2009 that confirmed objectives and methods relative to urban deer management in Helena. Within the plan, any take/removal of deer requires approval by the FWP Commission on an annual basis. To date, a total of 530 deer have been removed, including 105 removed during the latest removal effort in 2012. FWP does not contribute staff or resources to actual removal efforts. Any quotas do not apply to individual deer removed under urgent public-safety situations.

Survey data are collected and analyzed annually in October. Subsequently, the City, in cooperation with the local FWP biologist, establishes a level of take, which is presented to the Commission as a proposal in November and finalized in December, when take efforts are authorized to begin. Last year, largely due to mild winter conditions, deer were reluctant to enter traps and the take (105) was well below the objective (200). Under those circumstances, it would be helpful to extend the take period into the following fall, to allow additional time to take deer to meet the objective. FWP proposes that this take authorization be valid through December 31, 2013, with a no-take period extending from April 1 through November 14, 2013.

Survey data were collected during October and the analysis was recently completed. The data revealed an estimate of approximately 34 deer / square mile within the City of Helena. This is comparable to the 32 deer / square mile estimated in 2011, and above the identified density objective of 25. Given projected growth, the City and local FWP biologist are looking for a take up to 200 deer to reduce the population once again to below the target of 25 deer/sq mile. Proposed methods will be identical to those employed previously (trap and lethal removal).

Public Involvement Process & Results

The City of Helena conducted extensive public involvement in developing its plan and the previous urban deer environmental assessments. FWP provided separate 30-day public comment periods. Public support has been split throughout these earlier processes. Public comment on this proposal will extend through 5 PM Monday, December 17. FWP received 30 comments through December 3. Public support appears split and other alternatives including transplants and archery hunting were suggested.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2012 (status quo) as per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission discussion.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission adopt the final 2012 - 2013 take of urban deer by the City of Helena as presented by City staff and FWP.